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1921

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EARLY OHIOS AND
RHODE ISLAND REDS

A Comedy in One Act

By

Mary Katharine Reely

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RHODE ISLAND REDS

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By

Mary Katharine Reely

Author of "Daily Bread"

and other one-act plays



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May 23, 31
2374
This play was awarded first prize in
the Minneapolis Woman's Club contest
and was produced on January 25, 1921,
with the following cast:

MADGE SHEPHERD.....Miss Lucille Babcock
OLIVER SHEPHERD.....Dr. Robert Kennicott
MRS. NELS NELSON.....Mrs. Robert G. Wieskopf
ELLA CORWIN.....Mrs. Frederick H. Legg
TOM CORWIN.....Mr. Paul Rittenhouse
Produced under the direction of Miss Mary E. Cutler

CHARACTERS:

MADGE SHEPHERD

OLIVER SHEPHERD

MRS. NELS NELSON

ELLA CORWIN

TOM CORWIN

SCENE:

A simply furnished living room. At one side of the room, near the back, Madge sits at a small table writing a letter. On the other side, near the front and facing the audience, Oliver sits at a flat-topped desk figuring up accounts. Two business-like account books are open in front of him and he is working on a balance sheet. At the back of the room, to the right and just behind Oliver's desk, a door, partly ajar, opens into the kitchen. The room is warmed by an air-tight heater which stands near the wall between the kitchen door and Madge's table. The front door of the house, opening out onto a little stoop, is to the left, with windows at either side.

MADGE

[Pauses, uncertain what to say next. Writes another line, turns another page, and nibbles the end of her pen. Flings down pen and tears up letter in a rage.]

MADGE

What is the use? The only thing I can think of to tell her is that three of my old hens froze their feet during the cold snap.

OLIVER

Shut up. Now I've got to do this over again.

MADGE

[Tearing letter into scraps and paying no attention.]

When your best friend is having a gay time in New York, going to shows and dancing in cabarets, and you try to write to her for the first time since New Year's, and all you can think of that you have done in the whole three months only fills up half a page—

OLIVER

Keep still, will you, till I get this balance.

MADGE

[Gathers up bits of paper, takes them over to stove, removes top and drops them in. Some spill on the rug. She picks them up; every motion is vindictive.]

OLIVER

[Still figuring.]

That stove's smoking.

MADGE

Of course, it's smoking. Wood stoves always smoke. To think of living in a house heated with wood stoves in this day and age.
[Bangs cover on stove and adjusts damper.]

OLIVER

[Flinging down balance sheet.]

Well, I've got it! There it is! Do you want to know, darling, the amount of our annual income for the second year of residence on our landed estate?

MADGE

Oh, I suppose we went in the hole again.

OLIVER

No, dearest helpmeet, we came out on top. Our total net income, deducting all expenses, including your labor and mine, and accounting for all assets, is exactly thirty-nine dollars and twenty-six cents.

MADGE

Did you count in all the eggs we've eaten?

OLIVER

Every egg.

MADGE

And the canned fruit in the cellar?

OLIVER

Everything!

MADGE

[*Hopefully.*]

And my prize money from the county fair?

OLIVER

[*In disgust.*]

Yes, even that!

MADGE

[*Dropping into a little rocking chair that stands near the stove.*]

Well, of course, figures don't mean much to me. Still, we've had our living.

OLIVER

[*Striking the desk with the flat of his hand.*]

That's it! That's the joker in this farm game. That's what farmers have been saying for fifty years. They got their living! Now what kind of a life is it, I ask, when you work as hard as we do just for a living! Imagine any other business man giving that excuse—he got his living! But farmers aren't business men. That's the trouble. It's only because I'm a trained accountant that I know where I stand. Farming must be put on a business basis—

MADGE

[*Forlornly.*]

That's what I said when I went in for chickens, and I got the best of everything—incubators, brooders, trap nests, and all—and now Mrs. Nelson says I spent too much to begin with. Still, we've had the eggs.

OLIVER

And we could have lived in town and on any kind of a decent salary paid for the eggs twice over.

MADGE

[*Sharply.*]

But not such good eggs. I will say that, Oliver, although I'll admit everything else. But I must say it has been a great comfort to be able to break eggs for cake without having to sniff at them—yes, there's a satisfaction in feeling acquainted with the hens that lay your eggs. There's that to be said for farm life.

OLIVER

That's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking business sense. I'm saying that if a man put half the time and energy into any other business that he puts into farming, he'd be rich. And look at this—\$39.26! No wonder farmers don't pay income tax.

MADGE

Well, that's something to be thankful for.

OLIVER

Haven't even made enough money in two years to keep ourselves comfortable. [*Goes over to poke fire.*] House heated with stoves! And no chance of putting in a furnace another year.

MADGE

Oh, Oliver, we did say we'd never spend another winter here without a furnace!

OLIVER

[*Determinedly—folding arms and facing Madge.*]

Well, let's not.

MADGE

But you can't get a furnace for thirty-nine dollars.

OLIVER

Let's not spend another winter here. Let's quit. Let's go back. I can always get a job.

MADGE

Quit! Go back! But I've just set my incubator.

OLIVER

Damn the incubator. Unset it then. That's what got us into this. You, with your old poultry journals, sitting up nights to figure it out and reading me the figures: "If I set 150 eggs and get 150 chicks and each grows up to be a hen and lays 365 eggs a year, and I sell all the eggs at 75 cents a dozen, at the end of the year—" Oh, Lord!

MADGE

Well, what about you, pouring over your old seed catalogs and believing all their wonderful lies and telling me how many bushels of potatoes to the acre—

OLIVER

Oh, yes, I know, Madge [*beginning to pace the room*] we were two darn fools—never counting the eggs that wouldn't hatch or reckoning on wet years and slumps in prices. And we had it better than most, too, there's no mortgage on the old homestead—all clear to begin with.

MADGE

I'd hate to think Aunt Hattie's legacy had been thrown away.

OLIVER

Oh, we can get the money out of it all right—there'll always be other fools that want to go back to the land.

MADGE

I wonder what it would be like to live in town again. Oh, Oliver, Lily is having such a glorious time in New York. How long would it take us to save enough for a trip to New York on \$39.26 a year? But what would we do with all our things, Oliver, all my canned stuff? There'd be no room in a flat. And my incubator—with the chicks coming out in ten days?

OLIVER

Turn them over to Mrs. Nelson. She'd take 'em. Or sell them with the place. Come, we'll draw up an ad. There are always suckers. [*Sitting at desk.*] For Sale: [*Writing*] One Truck Farm. Forty acres. Motoring distance from town.

MADGE

When the roads are passable.

OLIVER

House in good condition. Piped for furnace.

MADGE

Which the present owners had hoped to install when they made enough off the place.

OLIVER

One incubator, set with 150 eggs of which 19 are guaranteed to hatch.

MADGE

[*Springing up.*]

Oliver Shepherd! The idea! I never had any such luck as that! Of course everybody knows that all the eggs can't be expected to hatch. And, anyway, why don't you advertise the place as a potato farm—fine soil for potatoes—not more than half will rot in the ground.

OLIVER

[*Angrily.*]

Well, it was a wet year, wasn't it?

MADGE

[*Pacing.*]

Oliver, this is a disgraceful way to act. I s'pose it's this spell of wet weather that's got on our nerves—rain for a week. And March is a horrid month anyway and Sunday's a boresome day. Are you serious, Oliver, about selling?

OLIVER

[*Whirling on her.*]

Yes, I am. I'll sell out land, equipment, improvements and all, including good will.

MADGE

I never did know what they meant by good will.

OLIVER

It means the continued neighborliness of Mr. and Mrs. Nels Nelson.

MADGE

Well, she is a good neighbor. Only I do get tired of her everlasting Swedishness.

OLIVER

She's a Norwegian, not a Swede.

MADGE

What's the difference?

OLIVER

Ask her if there's a difference.

VOICE OUTSIDE

Whoo-hoo!

MADGE

Oh, Heavens! What brings her out on a day like this?

VOICE

Whoo-hoo! Anybody home? [*Sound of an opening door—the outside door of the kitchen.*] I yust take off my rubbers on back porch and not track up your kitchen. My, it is so vet and muddy, but rain has stopped.

MADGE

[*Holding open the door.*]
Come in, Mrs. Nelson.

[*Mrs. Nelson comes in. She is a small, spare woman. A scarf is tied over her hair. She wears a man's coat and her skirt is pinned up over heavy shoes showing white socks.*]

MRS. NELSON

My, I could not stay in house any longer, so ven rain let up I go down to mail box. Yesterday in rain ve did not go for mail and I see you did not either, so I bring along your mail for you. [*Examining it.*] For Mr. Oliver Shepherd. [*Handing him a flat envelope.*] And for Mrs. Oliver Shepherd. [*Handing her a rolled paper.*]

[*Madge glances at name on wrapper and gives roll a fling into corner. Oliver opens the envelope, pulls out contents, glances at its gaudy cover and slams it down on the desk.*]

MRS. NELSON

Vell, vell! Vat is the matter?

MADGE

The Reliable Poultry Journal! Emphasis on Reliable! Oh, excuse us, Mrs. Nelson. We're as cross as two sticks today. It's the weather, I guess.

MRS. NELSON

Vedder! Vy, dis is nice vedder for dis time of year. Couldn't be better. Takes frost out of the ground and get ready for spring plowing later. [*Seats herself in little rocker—loosens her scarf and begins to rock—and continues to rock as she talks.*]

MADGE

Draw up to the stove. You must be damp.

MRS. NELSON

[*Hitching her chair.*]

It is nice to sit down by stove. Furnace she is nice, too, to keep house warm all over—but ve got along vidout it for twenty year and sometimes ven I sit down by hole in floor vere varm air comes up I vish I had a nice little heater to sit by. But I suppose you put furnace in some time soon, too?

OLIVER

Well, no, Mrs. Nelson. I doubt if we'll be making any more improvements. The truth is we've about decided to put the place on the market.

MRS. NELSON

So! Sell out! Vell, vell. How long you been here? Two year? Vell, you did pretty good. Dose folks that had the place before you stay six months only. Nels he say he tank von year vill be enough for you, but I say I tank maybe you stay a little longer.

OLIVER AND MADGE

What? What's that?

MRS. NELSON

I say I tank maybe you stay a little longer. I tank you are not so soft as oder city people.

MADGE

Soft! Mrs. Nelson, do you mean to say that you think Oliver and I are soft? You know as well as I do how hard we've worked.

MRS. NELSON

Oh, I say you are not so soft as oder city people. But you got it easy here on this place. All cleared. All under cultivation. Ven ve come here ve have all dose stumps to pull. You got good farm buildings. Ve have to build house ourselves before ve have place to sleep. And ve did not have Ford automobile like you got. Ve have only two old horses and von she die on us. Yas, you got it easy nowadays.

MADGE

Maybe we have, comparatively. But that isn't saying that Oliver and I are soft—and not willing to work as hard as necessary.

MRS. NELSON

Oh, no, I not say that. You vork pretty good, and Oliver he is no vorse den oder men from city. Now my son-in-law, my daughter Hulda's husband, de Lutheran minister, he always tink he can pitch oats vid de oders and after two or three bundles he is tired and have to stop. And my son Gustaf, who is professor in state college of agriculture—he know a lot about farming—but he is getting soft too, so now he gets blisters on his hand ven he handle pitchfork. And my daughter Lena, who teaches music in Twin Cities, ven her papa tells her she can drive team on hay rake like she used to, she is so shocked.

MADGE

Of course a piano teacher couldn't do rough work like that.

MRS. NELSON

Oh, Nels he is only yoking. Nels he is so proud of Lena, but he like to yoke vid her.

OLIVER

I notice, Mrs. Nelson, that your own children don't stay on the farm. They go to the cities.

MRS. NELSON

Vell, ven you got eight, you can't keep all at home. And Olaf he is von dat vill make best farmer of all. He vill take dis farm ven he graduates from college. Den papa and I vill make a little trip to California and see de vorld. Maybe ve go on visit to Old Country. Anyway, farm is good place for children to grow up. If dey go to city afterwards it not make so much difference. But city children are so ignorant. Have I told you about my little grandson? "Grandma," he say, "vich is cow dat gives de buttermilk?" So ignorant! And his papa a minister! Vell, dey can't help it. Dey grow up so soft and so ignorant and den dey come to live on farm and tink dey going to have easy time and den dey give up after six months and go back again.

MADGE

We did not give up after six months.

MRS. NELSON

Oh, no, you stay two years.

OLIVER

We think that two years of bad crops are enough.

MRS. NELSON

Oh, my! [*With unquenchable cheerfulness.*] Ven ve come here ve have bad luck for five years—two year vet, von year dry, and den de hail and den de tornado.

OLIVER

Well, I may be soft as you say, Mrs. Nelson, but if I have to wait five years for a decent crop of potatoes—

MRS. NELSON

Nels he say dat low ground is too heavy for dose Early Ohios. He say you plant your early potatoes up on slope vere dey get better drainage and use dat low ground for something else, you do better.

OLIVER

Oh, he does, eh? Well, you tell him that the first year I put potatoes on the slope and the vines all burned out.

MRS. NELSON

Nels he say you not cultivate deep enough.

OLIVER

Oh, he does, does he? Well, maybe he knows more than I—

MRS. NELSON

[*Placidly.*]

Yes. Vell, I must be running back. Too bad you are going to sell out. You been good neighbors—and in two, tree, five more years you get on your feet. [*To Madge, as she rises and ties her scarf*] I see you got hen shut up in coop.

MADGE

[*Rising.*]

Yes, she wants to set.

MRS. NELSON

Vy don't you let her?

MADGE

You know I use an incubator.

MRS. NELSON

Yas, so do I. I got incubator too. My son Gustaf, the professor, he persuade me to get it, but yust the same ven old hen vant to set, I von't cheat her out of de pleasure. And den I am always sure of a few chickens. After all, old hen is best incubator. Lamp never goes out under her. But Rhode Island Reds like you got are not such good setters as my vite Plymouth Rocks.

MADGE

For an all-round general purpose hen, I'll match my Reds against your Plymouth Rocks any day.

MRS. NELSON

Yes, maybe. My son Gustaf, from the agricultural college, he say Rhode Island Red is good hen, too. He send me two settings of eggs he vant me to try. I could give you von.

MADGE

Oh, thanks, Mrs. Nelson. But I have my incubator set. And if we are leaving—I had thought of asking you to take the chicks off my hands.

MRS. NELSON

Yas, I vill do dat—if you are leaving. Vell it is too bad. Goodbye. [*To Oliver, who has risen*] Nels he say if you try de lighter soil you do better. Vell, goodbye. [*Madge accompanies her to the door.*]

MRS. NELSON

Now I yust put on rubbers and scoot across home. Goodbye.

MADGE

Goodbye, Mrs. Nelson. [*Returning*] Huh! Soft, are we?

OLIVER

Do better in the lighter soil! Why that black loam is ideal for potatoes.

MADGE

Soft! Like her daughter Lena who teaches music in "Tvin Cities." I do get so tired of hearing about that family. Doesn't she think I know by now who they all are? Don't I know that Hulda is married to a Lutheran minister? Don't I know who Gustaf is? But, no! Always, "My son Gus-taf, pro-fes-sor in state col-lege of Ag-riculture!" And if I ever again have to hear the story about the buttermilk cow!

OLIVER

Me soft! Didn't I myself pitch bundles for Nels last fall, and didn't I keep him humping? Me soft, like her son-in-law. [*His eye has lighted on the seed catalog that he threw down a few minutes before. He picks it up—looks at cover, glances inside, then puts it down guiltily, glancing at Madge.*]

[*Madge, in crossing the room, has noticed the poultry journal. She makes a move to pick it up, then gives it a little kick with her foot instead. It rolls under the table.*]

VOICE OUTSIDE

Whoo-hoo!

MADGE

That woman again!

MRS. NELSON

[*Putting her head in door.*]

You going to get company. Automobile turning in gate. I ran back to tell you. Now I skip, so dey don't see me. [*Exit.*]

[*Madge hurries to window. Oliver follows.*]

MADGE

Tom and Ella Corwin! How did they get here? Look at their car! Spattered! Plastered!

OLIVER

Over that road! Great Scott, what brought 'em?

MADGE

But, Tom and Ella! How glorious! [*Throwing open the outer door.*] Hello, folks, hello!

OLIVER

I should say so! Hello! [*Hurries out.*]

MADGE

[*Grasping Ella's hands as she comes up on the stoop, draws her in.*]

Oh, Ella, I'm so glad.

ELLA

[*A picture of plump woe.*]

My shoes, Madge, my shoes! Tom made me get out of the car to lighten it, and then I tried to help him with some brush in front of the wheels, and look at me! Look at my shoes!

MADGE

My dear, my poor dear! That is too bad. But just you wait. I'll get a rag or something and we'll dry them.

ELLA

It was simply awful! Madge, what a place to live! How do you ever get anywhere? Such roads! And look at my skirt—all spattered.

MADGE

Now that will brush off when it dries. It's clean mud. And we'll wipe off the shoes. Just sit here by the stove. [*Propelling Ella.*]

ELLA

Oh, you heat your house with stoves. How quaint!

MADGE

[*Shortly.*] Yes, isn't it? Sit down. [*Hurries to kitchen.*] I'll get something to clean your shoes.

[*Enter Oliver with Tom.*]

TOM

Good Lord, man, do you mean to tell me that's the only way you have of getting in here? I told Ella we must have made a mistake—got off the main road. I said there surely must be another way.

OLIVER

[*Somewhat stiffly.*]

That's a new road—just graded last summer—and still soft. But you didn't have more than a couple of miles of it. The state road was all right, wasn't it?

TOM

A couple of miles was enough. In all the years I've been driving a car I've never had one look like this. Why, it will take a week to bargain her up—and probably get the enamel scratched in the bargain.

ELLA

Oh, Tom, and we'll have to drive into town looking that way! How terrible. We must wait till after dark.

TOM

Not much. I'll not risk driving over those roads after dark. We'll get an early start. [*Looking at his watch and snapping it shut.*]

OLIVER

[*Slapping him on the shoulder.*]
Oh, come, old sport, it isn't so bad as that. I tell you what. Make yourselves easy and then Madge and I will hop into the Ford and trail along with you to pull you out of the mudholes. We'll set you safe on the state road. That little bug of ours can crawl through anything.

TOM

If you mean that mud-coated object I noticed in the yard, it looks as though it had had to.

OLIVER

[*Coldly.*]
Well, you see a car on a farm is a utility, not a luxury, so we don't give so much thought to the enamel.

MADGE

[*Entering briskly.*]
Well, here we are. Now we'll brush you up. Tom, how are your shoes—and how's yourself? Why, we haven't shaken hands yet. How are you? You look fine and dandy. Now, Ella, [*dropping on her knees in front of Ella*] don't you want to take them off and put them by the stove to dry? I'll get a pair of—

ELLA

Oh, no, no. It's better for shoes to dry on the feet—they keep their shape better.

TOM

Stove, eh? Well, well, that's primitive.

ELLA

Oh, oh. Not so hard.

MADGE

I beg your pardon.

OLIVER

Yeh. Stove. Dandy little heater, that. Kindle a fire and in no time the room is warm. In the coldest weather of last winter that little stove kept us perfectly comfortable.

TOM

Well, you can give me steam heat for mine.

MADGE

There, now, if you'll just give them a little time. They're not really wet through. [*Takes cloth, etc., to kitchen.*]

TOM

[*Who has been examining the stove as a curiosity.*]
Burns wood, eh? How much do you pay for it?

OLIVER

That's the best part of it. The place was stocked up when we came and we haven't had to buy a stick. Good hard maple. Yeh, we got a bargain in more ways than one when we got this place.

MADGE

[*Returning.*]
There, now, everybody, take off your coats. Heavens, haven't we had the manners to ask you before this. And we'll draw up and have a jolly old visit. We're just dying to hear about everything, aren't we, Olly? We've been getting awfully on one another's nerves, haven't we?

ELLA

Well, I should think you would—living in such a hole.

MADGE

Oh, we aren't so awfully bad off. Do take off your things.

ELLA

Well—I don't know. Tom wants to get an early start—to get over those awful roads you know. Madge, I never saw such roads in my life!

MADGE

It's been raining for a week.

ELLA

There hasn't been a drop in town since yesterday and the pavements were all nice and dry, weren't they, Tom? And then when the weather turned out so pleasant this morning we decided to take a little run out to see you.

TOM

Little run is right. Would you believe it; we were on the road three hours. And we should have made it in an hour—over decent roads.

MADGE

[*Brightly.*]

Well, let's not talk about the roads—we know they're awful at this time of year. But do take off your coat, Tom, or you'll be cold when you go out. [*Ella has only loosened hers. Tom takes off his overcoat and moves across the room with Oliver. Throws coat across desk chair and they stand talking.*] And now I want to hear about everything. Tell me all you've been doing

ELLA

Well, let's see. What have we done? We went to the Orpheum one night. There's a good show this week. Better than last, don't you think so, Tom? [*Tom isn't listening.*] And then I've been playing bridge a lot. I've won quite a few prizes.

MADGE

I won a prize, too—at the county fair.

ELLA

And we go to the movies, of course. Tom likes the movies.

MADGE

We go to the movies, too—on Saturday nights. We drive to Prairie Center.

ELLA

Over those roads?

MADGE

[*Determined to ignore the roads.*]

We drive in after supper—and we market our eggs.

ELLA

How rural!

MADGE

And do our trading and then we go to the movies. They have very good pictures at the Center. Every Saturday night.

ELLA

Every Saturday night! What do you do the rest of the time?

MADGE

Well, we're busy people, you know. And evenings we read and sew and talk and figure up our accounts and find out how much money we're making—

ELLA

Heavens, don't you die of lonesomeness?

MADGE

Lonesome! Not a bit. We have neighbors and they drop in—Mrs. Nelson across the way was here just before you came.

ELLA

That queer looking creature in a man's coat that I saw running across the yard? I thought she was a beggar.

MADGE

The Nelsons are a long way from being beggars.

ELLA

Well, if she is a sample of your neighbors!

MADGE

I would have you know that the Nelsons are a very superior family. One of the sons is a professor at the state university. One of the daughters is an accomplished musician. Another daughter is married to a well-known clergyman.

ELLA

Then I should think they might see that their mother had some decent clothes. She looked like a scarecrow in that old man's coat.

MADGE

Well, if you object to that I don't know what you would think of me when I am at my work. I wear the trousers, too.

ELLA

Oh, but trousers are quite the thing. [*Looking her over critically.*] I will say for you, Madge, that you always look well whatever you do. And you haven't allowed yourself to get slack. That's a dear little dress.

MADGE

Do you think so? I'm so glad. I made it myself. That's one of the beauties of living out here. The days are so long. I can accomplish so many things. It's so free from distractions.

ELLA

I can believe that. [*Moves back from the fire.*]

MADGE

It is getting warm, isn't it? Let's move back. I still have a dozen questions to ask. Do you hear from Lily Slater? I was just thinking of writing to her. Here's her last letter. [*They lose themselves in conversation.*]

[*All this time Tom and Oliver have been talking. Oliver has perched himself on the desk and has reached around behind him to close the account book. Tom stands.*]

TOM

So you think you are making a good thing out of it?

OLIVER

Yes, I must say, all things considered, we've done pretty well. Of course, there's an outlay at the beginning that has to be paid off. We didn't expect to come clear the first year, but the second we not only paid expenses and got our living off the place, but we made a tidy little profit. [*Glances at Madge to see if she gets this.*]

TOM

Yep, but you worked pretty hard to get it.

OLIVER

But I tell you, Tom, it's the kind of work that agrees with a fellow. Makes you feel fit. Here! Just try that muscle. Nothing soft about that. And what you make is your own. Yep! Except for a little bad luck with my Early Ohios—

TOM

What the deuce are Early Ohios?

OLIVER

Early Ohios are potatoes.

TOM

Why don't you say so, then? But I don't see where the bad luck came in with the price you made us pay.

OLIVER

See here, if you think we get all of that—

ELLA

[Her voice rising shrill.]

But, Madge, what kind of a Red is that? A Rhode Island Red!

MADGE

A hen, my dear, a hen. I took third prize on mine at the county fair.

ELLA

Oh, I thought you were getting mixed up with something dreadful and socialistic.

TOM

[Looking at his watch.]

So I couldn't tempt you back? Better think it over.

OLIVER

Yes, I'll do that. I'll think it over. Thanks awfully, Tom, for letting me know. It was certainly good of you to drive out to tell me.

TOM

Well, if I'd known anything about your roads, I'd a telephoned.

ELLA

Don't you think we ought to be starting, dearie? Remember those awful roads.

TOM

Yes, we ought. I won't run any risks. That car is near enough a wreck now.

ELLA

Well, Madge dear. All you say about the simple life may be true, but I shall certainly breathe a sigh of relief when I am back on pavements again.

[Oliver and Madge are quite frigid, but Madge does her best.]

MADGE

I'm sorry you can't stay to supper.

ELLA

Oh, thank you, but we couldn't. I'd be on pins and needles.

MADGE

Anyway, I'm going to give you a jar of my plum preserves. And a dozen of my fresh eggs. Ella, wouldn't you love to take back a dozen of my fresh-laid eggs?

ELLA

Oh, thank you, no, dear. I'm sure they'd all be shaken to pieces in the car. And then I get very good eggs now. Very good.

OLIVER

I have the idea. Why not stay all night? Drive in in the morning when the roads have had a chance to dry out some.

ELLA

Oh, I couldn't think of it. Thank you—but farm houses are so damp and drafty.

MADGE

I'm sorry. But it was nice of you to come.

ELLA

So nice to see you. Good-bye. Come, Tom. Good-bye, Oliver.

MADGE

Good-bye, Tom. Hope you get home all right. So nice to see you.

TOM

Drop in to see us when you are in town. Only don't come in a car, try a boat.

OLIVER

I'll go out and start you off. If you remember to bear to the right going around that first mudhole— *[Exit.]*

MADGE

[In the doorway.]

Good-bye, good-bye. *[Waits for Oliver to come in—closes the door. She doesn't say anything, but her lips are pursed. Oliver, in preoccupation, strolls over to desk. Madge starts to cross to kitchen. Stops in front of stove.]*

MADGE

Quaint! Unique! Primitive! *[To kitchen.]* I suppose I can now sweep up the mud they tracked in.

[Oliver picks up his balance sheet and studies it.]

MADGE

[*Returning with broom and dust pan.*]
I hope I wasn't rude to my guests, but if I had heard another word about roads! [*Makes vicious dabs with broom.*]

OLIVER

What does he expect—in March? Besides, that road isn't so bad. I came through there yesterday. Anybody with half an eye could drive around those holes. S'pose I might have gone along to see them through—offered to once—but, by gosh, they rubbed it in a little too much and I got sore.

MADGE

[*Sweeping.*]
Damp—drafty—my house! [*Pausing.*] Oh, my goodness! I forgot the plum preserves. Well, no matter. [*Sweeping.*] She can stop and buy a jar at the delicatessen. They won't know the difference. Turning down an offer of my fresh eggs!

OLIVER

[*Abstractedly—looking up from his figures.*]
This would be a queer thing to do for a living again—putting down figures and adding up columns.

MADGE

[*Stooping with dustpan.*]
Softies. That's what they are. Softies. Ella's getting fat. Actually fat. Did you notice her double chin? No wonder. What does she do? The Orpheum. Bridge. The movies. I'd rather look like Mrs. Nelson. [*Straightening, jubilantly.*] Oliver, did you hear me extolling the Nelson family?

OLIVER

I should say I did. The only thing you left out was the butter-milk cow. [*Triumphantly.*] But did you get that little touch of mine about a tidy profit?

MADGE

I did. I had one ear cocked in your direction all the time. I was so afraid you'd let him see that balance sheet. You didn't, did you?

OLIVER

Not much. I was sitting on it.

MADGE

Thank heaven. If they hadn't been so smart and patronizing—
And they are ignorant, too. Why, they don't know the most
elementary things.

*[Oliver has put down the balance sheet and picked up the
seed catalog. Madge, in cleaning up, has come across the
poultry journal. She puts down the dustpan and begins to
tear off the wrapper.]*

OLIVER

[Putting the catalog down—speaks with determination.]
Tom told me there was a vacancy in the accounting department
I could have if I'd take it.

MADGE

[Putting down poultry journal with guilty air.]
Yes, Ella told me.

OLIVER

What did you say?

MADGE

I said that I just loved it here and couldn't bear to leave, but
that I didn't want to stand in your way. What did you say?

OLIVER

I said I was perfectly satisfied here but that it was a good offer
and that I'd think it over and consult with you and let him know.

MADGE

And then they'd patronize us ever after—and Ella Corwin would
be forever telling about the awful hole they found us in and how
they came to our rescue!

OLIVER

And Nels Nelson would say that I was soft and didn't know
how to cultivate my land and made a failure of it.

MADGE

And Mrs. Nelson would say that we—

VOICE

Whoo-hoo!

MADGE

What! Again!

VOICE

Come out vonce to back door, den I von't have to take off my rubbers.

MADGE

Coming, Mrs. Nelson.

VOICE

I brought you von of dose settings.

MADGE

[To Oliver, uncertainly.]

She's brought a setting—of eggs—the old hen wants to set—and since I have to wait for my incubator anyway— *[She is moving slowly toward the door. As Oliver makes no comment she goes out.]*

[Oliver, left alone, picks up the seed catalog—runs through the leaves—pauses to read—sits on arm of chair—turns pages slowly and reads—slips down into chair—crosses his legs in comfort and reads—takes out pencil and checks along the margin—Madge returns—he does not look up.]

MADGE

[Nibbling a piece of pastry.]

Mrs. Nelson brought some "fattigmans." Have one.

OLIVER

[Taking it without looking up.] *[Nibbles.]*

Um-m. Good.

MADGE

[Her mouth full.]

Um-m. Awful good.

[Madge picks up poultry journal and begins to look at it. With her eyes glued to the place, she picks up the dustpan that she had left in the chair, puts it on the floor, sits down, and continues to read.]

MADGE

I thought as long as the old hen wanted to set—and as long as I have the incubator started—

MADGE

[After silence.]

I don't believe it. This man says he got 195 chicks out of 200 eggs.

OLIVER

You know Nels may be right about those Early Ohios—it says here—to plant after danger of frost in light sandy loam—

MADGE

I'll bet he never got that many more than once.

OLIVER

There's a new tomato here—cross between the Scarlet Mammoth and Burst-of-Dawn—might try an acre of tomatoes—

MADGE

Um-m—cracked corn, two parts, wheat middlings three—

OLIVER

And a new cabbage—the Greenland Giant—

MADGE

[*Triumphantly.*]

Here, listen! For an all-round general purpose hen it is hard to beat the Rhode Island Red! Just wait till I show her that! And the author of the article—Great Heavens! The author is Gus-taf, Pro-fess-sor in state college of agriculture! So she'll still have the better of me. Well, no matter! [*Slapping magazine shut.*] Oliver Shepherd, are you going to take that job and sell this farm?

OLIVER

Huh? What'd you say? You know if Nels is right about those Early Ohios, it wouldn't be a bad idea to set out cabbages—

MADGE

Hooray! [*Sweeping across room.*] Hooray, we're off! [*Throwing her arms around Oliver's neck as she leans over his chair.*] Nothing can stop us now. Nobody can drag us off this place. And if you set out 500 cabbage plants and they live and grow and each one has two heads— You are an old cabbage head yourself, Oliver. [*Kisses him on top of it.*]

OLIVER

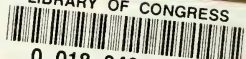
[*With his eyes on his seed catalog.*]

Um-m—yeh. That's what I said—cabbage heads—going to put in a couple of acres—down where I had the Early Ohios.

CURTAIN

In the Minneapolis production of the play a real Rhode Island Red was introduced with good effect. Madge goes to the kitchen and tiptoes in with the old hen, dropping her into Oliver's lap.

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